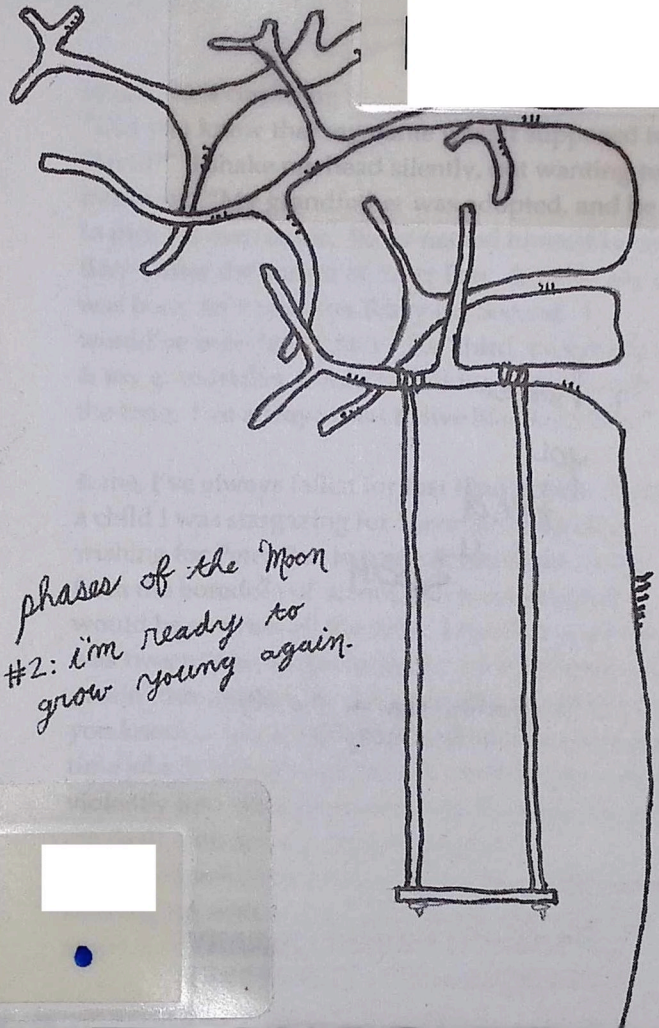

phases of the Moon
#2: i'm ready to
grow young again.

"I hope
you
find
it soon..."

(graffiti seen on the day
I left Chicago)

Drunk, he's confiding in me. He's telling me secrets. "Did you know that my name wasn't supposed to be David?" I shake my head silently, not wanting to interrupt. "My grandfather was adopted, and he got to pick his own name. So he named himself James Barry, after the author of Peter Pan. & when my dad was born, he was James Barry the Second. I would've been James Barry the Third, except my dad & my grandfather weren't speaking to each other at the time. I've always tried to live like Peter Pan."

& me, I've always fallen for that kind of boy. Even as a child I was stargazing for Neverland, fiercely wishing for Peter Pan to come & whisk me away from the boredom of school, to a place where it would be summer all the time. I got that wish when I was twenty-one, in the form of a young drifter—just passin' through, really, not intending to fall in love, you know… our travels took us far away from part-time jobs & college courses, but we were soon shoved violently into what grownups call The Real World as we dealt with an unexpected pregnancy, unemployment (not by choice this time), debt finally catching up with me, & lots of social scorn, lots of anger & frustration.

Two years later, it seems life has finally settled down, but I'm crying to my drifter: "I am just so *tired.* I feel like an old lady." He tells me the fire's gone out of my eyes. I tell him I hate that I don't feel as intensely about music like I used to, that I am so terrified to make art these days that all I do is read books & take naps & eat potato chip sandwiches & mourn the loss of the great & seemingly-endless summer of ought-four.

When I was seventeen, I remember reading an article on how to cope with activist burnout & thinking, no, not me, no way—my passion cannot be extinguished so easily. This will not happen to me.

We're all teetering on the edge, all the time. All of us with our non-traditional relationships & conscious consumerism & art in the face of eviction & zines & mix tapes & intensity & drive to do something good. We're trying so goddamn hard, but what does it matter when an old white guy can say the word and blow up a country, despite thousands of protesting voices? What does it matter when you have to go wash dishes or sell shit tomorrow morning, when

you're buying records in order to dismantle capitalism? Sometimes it all seems so hopeless.

We've been thinking a lot about death, these days. & the fire burns low.

"My passion--it's *dead*," I'm admitting to myself as much as to him. No one has called me a failure, but it is implied: you're so smart, why aren't you in college? yes, but how can you make *money* doing photography? It's hard, sometimes, to keep ignoring them, to stick to what I really believe in. It's so easy to second-guess myself, & it's so easy to place the blame on circumstances because I am afraid to acknowledge the self-destructive patterns of my own actions.

I can see myself making the same mistakes throughout my twenties: moving to a new city, struggling for a part-time job so I can be just barely self-sufficient, staying up late to drink and/or make art, complaining that too much of my time is being stolen by my job. Running into the next new pair of open arms. Thinking that the solution is to move to a different city. Insisting that I run toward not away.

Being thirty and looking back, dissatisfied with an entire decade of life, obsessing over the past, becoming cynical & disaffected. No no no. I refuse. This is my resistance.

David & I are sitting on his front porch. It is January and it is sixty-five degrees outside and I am happy to be back in the dirty sweet south. We are listening to Gogol Bordello: *in the old times, in the old times, in the old times it was not! a! crime!* He's smoking; I'm reading Howard Zinn. "We should build a time machine," he says. I put my book down & look purposefully at the precarious stack of cardboard boxes in the corner. "Absolutely!" This is a year of yesses, and I speak in absolutes.

When I was younger, this is how I felt regret: I truly thought that if I could find the secret door, it was possible to go back in time & correct whatever

mistake I'd made. I *knew* it was possible—the grownups probably knew how to do it. Or maybe they had known but forgot. Same with flying. I had so many dreams about being able to fly, and it felt *so real* that I just knew I could eventually figure out how to do it. Maybe I had to fall down a certain way, or if I thought about it really hard I would start levitating like a swami in cartoons. Maybe Peter Pan would show me how, someday.

It is June, and I have decided to live in Chicago. This is a mistake. I know this is a mistake after four weeks, but I stay for seven months because I believe I have something to prove: that I can stop complaining and just stay in one goddamn city. At the end of the six months, I will have learned how to tell when I need to stick it out in order to learn something valuable, and when I need to drastically uproot my life in order to attain happiness. I also will have learned to embrace my impulsive urges, love my ability to romanticize everything, and fearlessly follow my instincts. But, as it is, I am now hunched over a laptop, sweltering in my ex-boyfriend's apartment. I have not slept because I have been

writing all night. Writing & reading, scouring friends' blogs & old emails for reassurance & inspiration. I have reached that point of intense concentration where I will not leave the desk, not even to open the window to the summer dawn. I will probably delete everything I've written.

Zan is riding his bicycle from our previous home in Athens, Georgia & in two weeks he will cut his trip short & hitchhike the rest of the way to Chicago. We miss each other too much. It was silly for us to separate like that. But we just had a baby & gave her up for adoption, & I think it's okay if we go a little bit crazy. I often forget why I came to Chicago in the first place: I *wanted* the anonymity of the big city so I could process the events of the past year, but I soon realized that I *needed* the community of friends we left behind in Athens. Everything I own is packed in cardboard boxes & I just want some kind of stability. It's been so long. Someday, I will learn that stability does not happen just because you've signed a lease.

This sleep-deprived morning is nearly all I remember of Chicago's summer, and I really have to struggle to keep that memory. When I think of Chicago, I think of the cold, mean city sagging under grey skies. I

remember cursing under my breath as I waited for the train to take me to work, where I sold pop culture artifacts I couldn't afford to buy even if I wanted to. I think of the disintegrating friendship my ex-boyfriend & I are trying to maintain, the curt exchanges between Zan & myself, my complete inability to be affectionate. We ate rice & did the crossword puzzle every week, paid bills & slept the days away. My journal often consisted of lists: things to do, how to budget the next paycheck, books to read. I diligently recorded every day in my planner. Writing things down, crossing them out, tricking myself into thinking I was really accomplishing something.

My love for classification & organization can be traced back to my earliest memories. Learning to read, I hated the *incompleteness* of our lessons at school: we'd skip around in the textbooks because there was never enough time in the year to read the whole thing. We'd never get to read all the stories, and in science class we were always learning about photosynthesis or the parts of the cell, year after year, and never got to the good stuff at the end of the

book—like geology & astrology. So, I would take my textbooks home and read them cover to cover, learning the names of the planets and types of rocks and different ecosystems. I have always loved to simply know the *names* of things—as if knowing what something is called gives insight into the core of its being. I can pore over nature guides for hours, speaking aloud the names of mushrooms and flowers and insects; I trace countries on maps, pronouncing exotic places & memorizing cities. I always checked out general question-and-answer books from the library, enamored with this idea that all the world's knowledge can be contained within a single thick volume. As my reading skills improved & my view expanded, I tackled the encyclopedia, but gave up when I was still in the A's—already the world was too overwhelming to me.

I spent an incredible amount of time in the library when I was a kid. For a long time, I favored serial novellas & was constantly trying & failing to read entire runs of various young adult stories: *The Boxcar Children, Sweet Valley High,* R. L. Stine's *Goosebumps* and *Fear Street, Little House on the Prairie.* Setting impossibly huge goals, and then feeling bad when I

lost interest & couldn't bring myself to read all 100+ of the increasingly repetitive *Baby-Sitters' Club* books.

The concept of unlearning is something I've been thinking about a lot lately. We've all picked up so many unhealthy habits & ideas over the years. Me, I bite my nails & panic over lack of money, fight my inferiority complex that stems from my refusal to get a college degree & participate in a system that fosters elitism and capitalism (among many other unsavory things). Plan impossible goals & get frustrated when I lose interest in them so quickly. I've bent my will so often to please others, I often forget what the hell I really want to do.

I am ten years old, and I am playing office with my across-the-street neighbor, a girl two years younger than me but with twice as much attitude. She makes fun of me because I have to read along to the lyrics to "Ice, Ice Baby." We weave bracelets & play with her McDonald's drive-thru set that has plastic hamburgers and a red uniform & one time I showed her mine & she showed me hers while we sat in the middle of the sidewalk in our bathing suits. My

mother works for the gas company & always brings office supplies home for us. She & I have the same initials so I have a lot of tablets & pens that say S. M. Piotrowski and this makes me feel very professional.

I am twenty-two, and I lust over the Office Depot catalog even though I understand that a perfectly organized desk in no way reflects my mind. If my brain was a filing room—in the basement, of course—the cabinets would be overflowing, and I bet the drawers would have dents from getting jammed & kicked. Pages with footprints trampled on the floor. Not enough light. Dried-out Sharpies & gelroller-pens in cracked coffeemugs, four different kinds of tape, unread mail piling up in the inbox & outdated outgoing mail waiting for postage. I'm fascinated by the *idea* of organization, but my room is still a mess. I know exactly where everything is.

Still wearing out obsessions like I did when I was eight & we got our first video game system, the Super Nintendo. Christmas day, we woke up & played Super Mario World for hours, and when the game was beaten in mere days, the excitement had fizzled out but I already wanted more. Waiting,

waiting, for the next new video game my family couldn't really afford.

I've worked some terrible jobs and some nice ones, and I think I deal with finances the same way I did when I was a child, saving up coins in plastic bags which were hefted onto store counters so I could buy a comic or a Polly Pocket or something equally unable to keep my interest for very long. Still I kept these toys, and kept coming back to them, wishing I could feel just as excited as the day I first held each one in my hands. I'd construct elaborate money-making schemes—the lemonade stand was so played out, you know, I needed something that would really grab people's attention: selling painted rocks door-to-door, having a carnival in our backyard, mini-yardsales to get rid of toys we didn't want anymore. Today, I construct elaborate budgets & rarely stick to them, still trying to learn that I don't really need money to survive comfortably. There's a certain security in being insecure, I always say, and this is why I've been afraid to stop depending on capitalism for instruction on how to live my life. Oh yes, yes, yes, I want to hop trains, I want to hitchhike again, I want to tell my debt collectors to shove it, I want to

drink sweet liqueurs and write beautiful poetry and play sad music and kiss and dance—for years I said *I can't*, for years I let them tell me I was a failure, throwing my life away…but maybe, just maybe…I should start listening to the people who are telling me I am amazing.

Oftentimes the best way to find a solution is to completely remove yourself from the problem. In November, Zan & I took a twenty-hour bus ride from Chicago to Athens, intending to spend a quiet few days visiting our friends, our daughter, & her adoptive parents. Instead, there were nights of drinking, confessed crushes, communal dinner parties, bright eyes and big hugs, and the realization that we truly had a community of caring friends in this town. Our five months in Chicago slipped away as we were surrounded by positivity & idealism. Listening to the sweet sounds of insects singing outside—in direct opposition to Chicago's blaring sirens & angry car horns—I understood that there is no honor in suffering for the sake of something I don't believe in. So, we decided to come back.

Two months dragged by as I counted down the days, trading secret-message mixtapes with David & making plans via MySpace, and on New Year's Eve Zan & I arrived in Athens after a stressful, sleep-deprived road trip in a too-expensive rental car. "Are you here for good?" everyone asks us. Not forever, but definitely for good.

Later, I'm sharing raspberry liqueur at a New Year's party populated by snazzily-dressed boys & girls & girls who look like boys & boys who look like girls—I only know three other people at this party, but I feel completely welcome. I stole sips from David's whiskey, traded champagne & secrets with another girl who, like me, is torn between two cities: *"he's been talking about you for months, saying 'I can't wait until stacey gets back,' and I've never seen him happier."* David smiles when I tell him my stories, just smiling & eyes shining & taking me in. Responsible me, nursing a mug of water in one hand all night & refusing to get sick, just laughing and laughing, staying on the charming side of drunk. Twenty of us took papercup-shots of tequila toasting 2007. At midnight, the champagne exploded all over us, kissing & dancing to a breakneck punkrock version

of Auld Lang Syne. Seconds later, the skies opened up and the rain fell down, & I grabbed David's hand and we ran into the street, spinning and dancing and forgetting about the chill, just laughing and laughing as I put the past far, far behind me.

We went to his house soon after, took off our soakingwet clothes and hid under the warm blankets, giggling & kissing. "I missed you." *"I've been waiting months for this."* "You're so beautiful." *"I should be saying that to you."* & oh, *"How can I ask you to spend the night?"* "I will stay. I will stay."

Slow & patient, I love the drowsy drunk *fuck*, taking time into my hands and stopping it so I can feel every little sensation, whiskey loosening my tongue so I remember to *say* all the sweet things I think—the iwantyous & yourebeautifuls--while I'm unbuttoning his perpetually inkstained, ripped shirt. This boy, he doesn't quite fit into his body; his bones seem too big for his skin. He hides behind a black hoodie & downcast eyes, but I catch him smiling all the time. Unexpectedly affectionate, he's at my side through the night, all six feet of him curled up around me & we sleep-talk nonsense conversations while the whiskey grows stale in our mouths.

I became a woman on the day I gave birth to my daughter. I was strong & powerful, & I trusted my body completely, & became beautiful. It is nice to have such a definitive rite of passage, to be able to point to a specific day & say, "that's when it happened." Years of feeling strange & shy & uncomfortable slipped away like slick scabs and suddenly I felt like my body belonged to me.

It's been nearly nine months since I gave birth to our daughter, & it is still so difficult for me to make love with Zan. I jump when he touches me, can't feel comfortable sharing my body with him. I trust him, but there is too much sadness, still. Eyes closed or open, I see our daughter, remember her scent, her wail when we gave her to the adoptive parents. I try to hold my breath but I'm crying at the climax, such bittersweet relief. I speak in childish generalities: "I don't want anything to go inside, but I want something to come outside." My body is telling me to get pregnant again; biologically, hormonally—it just thinks the baby died at birth, and it wants to try again. Always such conflict, because I *do* want to get pregnant again, I *do* want to be a mother, but I also *don't*. Not right now, not when I've still got so much

wildness pent up inside, when I go out drinking & lose sleep & want to be on the road again so badly. I need to get all of this out of me first, screaming it out in the middle of the desert, & in Barcelona, & New Orleans, & in the Pacific Ocean, & Morocco. & then one day I'll find a place to stop, a house & a community that wants to help us raise a radical kid.

When I was very very young, my parents caught me touching myself, dragged me by the wrist to the kitchen sink to wash my hands, telling me it was poison. I was confused, but grateful, thinking that I'd've surely died if they hadn't intervened. Years later, I was beginning to learn about sex, and couldn't figure out how anyone could come out of it alive. I didn't masturbate until I was seventeen, & I didn't stop feeling guilty about it until I was twenty-one. Zan is the only person who ever spoke to me about it seriously, supportively, with no teasing whatsoever. All I needed was one person to say, "Oh yes, I understand," and then it was all okay.

I forgave my parents long ago, because I was their first kid, because they couldn't've known—because parents are constantly afraid of fucking up & it must be terrifying to speak with your own supposedly innocent supposedly sexless child about something you are not totally comfortable with, either. I've never talked to them about this; surely they have no idea how deeply that affected my perception of self & sex. Doubtless, they've forgotten that day ever happened. Hopefully, I'll not make a similar mistake with my own children.

I only have one secret. I love my hips & curves & bones; I love this in-between state of being a young lady who has had a child, a wild maiden-mother. I was born female & have always identified as such, except—when I masturbate, [redacted]

I don't like secrets very much.

My first period came when I was twelve. I knew what it was—already had The Talk, in strictly biological terms. Still, I was scared; heart pounding, breath catching, pacing the bathroom with my stained panties crumpled on the floor. This was the *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* moment of transition: I am supposed to be a woman now…but I didn't feel very grown up. I understood my period as being restrictive. I wouldn't be able to swim, or play rough—in fact, I shouldn't even be playing at all, because I'm a *woman* now. It was a hindrance—years of thick cotton pads; steadily intensifying cramps requiring more & more aspirin, then Midol, then prescription-strength Naproxen; dejectedly sticking my legs in the pool & missing out on all the fun. I read *Cunt* when I was seventeen, & began the long process of stopping my self-hatred. I stopped taking pills for my cramps, and instead started staying home from work or school so I could take

baths, eat chocolate, read books, and embrace my heating pad; soon, my cramps weren't so bad. I sewed cloth pads from my old high school gym shirt, and never again put chemically-bleached nastiness in my most absorbent area. Today I wear skirts & bleed freely & enjoy having a monthly opportunity for quiet self-cleansing, mental & physical & emotional. It sounds easy, written in one paragraph like that, but this process took ten years to complete. Make peace with yourself.

Sometimes, by choice I dress in a manner that was once suffocatingly oppressive. The Catholic gradeschool uniform: nice black shoes, knee socks, plaid skirt, dress shirt. Eight years of this constant worrying self-consciousness roiling in my belly, making me sick. Are my socks falling down? Is my skirt riding up? Yesterday my best friend, today she's sneering at me because I wore a bright pink bra underneath my white button-up shirt. Kids can be so fucking cruel, so finicky. It's no wonder I grab on & don't let go when someone shows me the slightest sign of affection. It's no wonder I'll follow boys all over the country.

I was overjoyed to go to a public high school, & spent most of those four years hiding in baggy black t-shirts, huge JNCO jeans, big black headkicking boots of doom, letting my hair grow disheveled, painting my nails black, wearing lots of clanking metal jewelry.

& today, it's sophistipunk, a combination of the two phases: plaid skirt, knee socks, snazzy screenprinted tight t-shirt, sneakers. I've reclaimed the plaid skirt for myself, made it liberating & beautiful, 'cause I no longer feel the need to reject my childhood, to ignore it. I'm bringing all these memories back up & I can see exactly how they fit into the person I am now.

It happens like this: you are twelve years old, standing in church, monotonously reciting the Our Father, & suddenly you realize that you have no idea what these words mean. You've been saying these words for six years—maybe more—and no one ever told you what they mean. No one ever told you why you have to go to church every week, why you have to tell a priest about all the bad things you've done, why you must try to get into Heaven when you die.

Simple as that, I wasn't Catholic anymore. Telling people about it, well, that took some time.

If you were Baptized into Catholicism as a baby, your parents spoke for you, promising to teach you in the Catholic faith. At age 13, when you can speak for yourself, there is a ceremony called Confirmation, where you're basically saying you believe in Catholicism & are going to be Catholic for life—it's a pretty important choice to make at the confusing onset of adolescence. At my Confirmation, the Bishop paused before blessing us, and said that if anyone has any doubts, or wants to change their mind, then by all means stand up and say something about it. Stand up, a shy, scared, & scrawny just-turned-teenager in the middle of a packed church, in front of all your friends & family & your friends' families, and tell them that you don't wanna go through with it. Oh, did I ever want to stand up & cause a huge scene, but I didn't—couldn't—do it. Couldn't disappoint my family like that. I went to church until I moved out of my parents' house. One day, I'll hold my ground. One day, I'll stop doing things for other people.

Catholicism is all about ignoring the present in favor of planning for a future that may or may not even happen. Putting off the pleasures of today in the hope that the Heaven of tomorrow will be far more fulfilling. The more mainstream or "socially acceptable" path in American culture is quite similar: go to school to prepare for college, college to prepare for a job. Work shit jobs & hope you'll get promoted if you stick around long enough. Work all your life & put money away so that when you start falling apart at age 65 you can finally start enjoying life. Sit around in a nursing home waiting to die.

START LIVING NOW.

I think I regret nearly everything I did in 2006. Admitting is acceptance.

My father & I haven't spoken for a year and a half. He disproves of the adoption, & I found out through other family members that he's heartbroken & fears he'll never get to see the baby. He turns fifty-three this year, & always said he'd die at fifty-three, like

his father, heart attack out of nowhere. I don't know how to reach out to him, & so I simply do the things he taught me: how to cook, how to garden, how to build things out of wood (I'm working on a bookshelf now). I'm ready to remember him in case he does decide to die.

The truth is: I wanted to change my mind. In the hospital, I wanted to scream *NO I WANT TO KEEP HER*, but I was too scared of what that would mean—what would happen the next day, and the next, with an unexpected baby. We'd been preparing for the adoption for nine months, but then I saw her outside my body & I fell in love & I wanted to be her mother, but I still didn't think I could do it. I made up stupid excuses like "I don't have a job" & "I don't have a degree" & "I am so in debt" & "I want to travel" and then I read about a lot of radical parents in similar or even worse situations who still raised their kids wonderfully and then I knew I could've done it if only I had more strength & self-confidence & if only I told my friends I could've had their support, too. I know that everything will work out in the end but goddamn it hurts so much sometimes. It is such a heavy sadness to carry. I will never, ever make a decision based on fear again.

When my daughter was born, I began to understand my own mother. In spite of all our disagreements & differences, she feels the same unbreakable mother-child bond with me as I do with my own daughter—no matter what, I will love you. Even when I am angry, I will remember to love you. She did her best. That's all we can do.

Still & all, I worry sometimes that my daughter will rail against me when she's older, demanding answers when all I can give her are some zines & journals & *"I was scared."* When she asks me where she came from, what do I say? Everywhere, nowhere. The side of the road, a couch in New Jersey, Pittsburgh, Georgia, Ireland, Poland, Scotland, a coal mine, a Greek Orthodox church, Massachusetts, a punk house with no heat, a moment of irresponsible passion, fear, love. You've got my fierce eyes & your father's determined lips & you smile like your adoptive mommies. She flickers ghosts of the past.

I'm developing a minor obsession with family, with the idea of roots, with finding out where I came from. I feel like the things that make one inherently American are missing from me—or, more likely, I've

purposefully rejected those qualities, interpreting them as lies. But I also feel detached from my heritage, like it would be some kind of gross misappropriation of culture for me to reclaim a past I haven't experienced. This is why I love gypsy punk so much; it takes bits & pieces of culture & music & dance from all over the world and throws it all together, relating & tying people together across distances & time, like how a melting pot should really be.

My grandparents are all dead—I've no one to tell me the old stories firsthand. I have boxes of brittle gray photographs, cursive captions & years scrawled on the back. But still, I don't know what it was *like:* my grandfather stealing a flag from the Nazis in World War II, my grandmother dying of cancer & forgetting the names of her children, my ancestors coming to America from Ireland & Poland, the marriages & divorces, the births, the deaths, the addictions, the traditions.

My mother's parents used to host the family Christmas dinner each year. Grandma would cook all day, presents piling up under her small tree, children playing downstairs, undoubtedly a group of

men watching television in the den. For some of us, it was the only time we saw certain family members all year—great-aunts second cousins whose names I couldn't remember. Grandma died in 2000, & Pap followed soon after, & my family moved into their empty house, & we tried to have the Christmas dinner that year but it just wasn't the same. She'd held the family together; now everyone drifted apart into awkwardness.

Sometimes, I smile like my sisters & my mom & my aunt, & I think I belong in my family.

My name, Stacey, means rebirth; but my surname, Piotrowski, means "[child] of Piotr," or Peter, which is the rock, as in "upon this rock I shall build my church." Always changing, but inherently stable. The security of being insecure.

I miss the endless summers of my childhood. There was no concept of time or transition—when it was summer, it was summertime forever…I didn't understand nor care that winter would happen eventually.

I know exactly when I first became aware of the fact that the world existed outside my personal perception. My siblings & I, there are five of us all together, always crammed into a small house, so there are many opportunities to annoy one another. Nasty words & slaps across the face are dispensed without much thought. My sister was distracting me from my video gaming, so I began to smack her in the face again & again, screaming about how stupid she was being. & in the midst of this, I suddenly understood that I was causing her pain…so I started crying & apologizing & I couldn't believe that I'd been so heartless all these years. I never hit any of them again. Now, it is very easy for me to redirect my rage, to resist the instinct that tells me to lash out when I am so angry I can't speak. Today, I can walk away from that. Rage is channelled into dirty charcoal drawings, drunkenly punching trees, turned around & diffused into my tendons & creaking bones as I turn my back & calmly walk away.

Somewhere down the line, we learn fear. We fall off our bikes one too many times & then we're afraid to bomb down that hill, we fell out of too many trees & now we're afraid to look down. I used to walk into

traffic when I was a teenager, yelling "I *am* the right of way!" and they would stop, of course they'd stop, they *had* to stop, but nowadays I'm not so sure...

Walking through the woods, I find pieces of shiny ceramic tile & call it treasure, because I am six & I don't know any better. I don't know that broken things are really garbage, so they can be anything I want. The unknown is magical until you learn fear—then you want to pin things down with names, definitions, explanations, and when you can't name a thing you reject it. We are afraid of death, but it really might be something beautiful—it might be a buried treasure if we look at it in the right angle of sunlight.

Somewhere down the line, I forgot how to play pretend. I got scared to improvise, got made fun of one too many times & now I'm afraid of such silly things as "sounding stupid." When I was nine I ran off & explored the woods by the softball field; my parents couldn't find me & I felt so grown-up because I knew exactly where I was.

I drink vodka like water & then I'm not afraid to dance. I'd like to be able to do it without the vodka, though.

In the too-early drunk-sick morning, David & I are hiding under the blankets and I say "It's a tent! In the jungle!" He doesn't know it, but this phrase has a long history of drug-related inside jokes attached to it—but that's irrelevant now. "What jungle is it?" & I'm playing pretend with Peter Pan; I'm nervous & the words are threatening to choke my throat but I say, "South America" because I would certainly love to see the jungle there. & he asks me what we're doing in the jungle & I say I want to see butterflies as big as my head, they have those here don't they? & it's really that easy to reclaim your childhood.

"Tell me somethin' good, he always says. Always putting me on the spot. For a second, I'm at a loss for words—it's not because I can't think of anything good, but because it's hard to choose just one thing to tell, this time. I want it all to come spilling out onto the table between us.

Last night, sharing whiskey & acoustic guitars round

a campfire on Nowhere Road. Madeline always sings the truth: I am surrounded by crusty rail-riders, quiet artistic types, a few drunken loudmouths, and of course that attention-grabbing almost-obnoxious Nancy-girl, and all of us shut the hell up and stared at the fire because we could all hear our lives in her songs. We all knew that girl, and this boy, and this thing that happened to me or you or my best friend. & later, Bellyache played, and, oh my, that man surely has the devil in him. Belting out the blues with Robert Johnson's ghost, a ragged bunch of orphans howling at the moon. He covers "Just Can't Be Satisfied": *well I never been to Georgia, don't know but I been told, all them sweet li'l Georgia girls got that jelly-roll.* I smile & grab David's hand & I feel like I completely belong here. In this city, with these people, indefinitely. This is a home.

(In my journal, December 2005: "I just want to find a place that is called home.")

I recognize my friends' bikes parked all over town. I wear skirts in January because it is sixty-five degrees. Insects & tree frogs & trainwhistles sing me to sleep

each night. I photograph abandoned buildings & start addressing people as "miss" & "sir." We share everything & leave our doors unlocked & strangers say hello & I am distracted by friends during my errands & I love all of it. I will never live in a big city again, & I will never live in a place that gets cold. I say I don't want to leave for a long time, but David tells me he's been trying to get the hell out for years. I know what that is, & I know that it is dangerous, & still I ask him why.

He tells me why, & I do not cry because I cannot let my own sadness get in the way. I take the pain & diffuse it into my bones, filling the holes in the marrow. "I'm leaving for New Orleans in two weeks," he says, & I, who so recently said *this place feels like home*, felt it surging forth, that familiar pain in my chest--*ask me ask me ask me, oh take me with you*--clamped my mouth shut, this time. No one ever sees it coming. Friends leave for better things, & that inspiration is so contagious. I love the feeling of going away, of going *toward* the unknown. I absolutely love to throw everything away. *It's been one perfect crime, all my life.* & New Orleans, it's so close now, so very close--I can visit anytime. My

sunken city, my daughter named for that crumbling city, named for everything I've ever lost, everything I've ever let go. I don't know what I'm looking for, & really, I don't think I care anymore. The security of being insecure. A perpetual state of transition. The feeling of being in motion. I've got a plan.

thank you: david, zan, bryan vokey, snoozin, susan, jessica lynn, k. marie, christopher, alexa, nikki fuckin' trader, rachel.

who needs sleep when you've got: royale club (oh no), punk rock haircuts, sixty-five degrees in january, borrowed bicycles, raspberry liqueur, soulseek, food not bombs!, bootlegged episodes of *are you afraid of the dark?*, cuddle parties, *everything is illuminated* (the movie).

technical support: kate's digital camera, the marei davis memorial infoshop, treehouse printing company (read: david made the front cover).

music: bellyache, mischief brew, gogol bordello, the world/inferno friendship society, madeline, society of probable monsters, firewater, titans of filth.

phases of the moon #2: i'm ready to grow young again completed 1/21/07 in the small hours. please get/keep in touch. right now i live here: ~~185~~

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even in kyoto
hearing the cuckoo's c
I long for kyoto
-bashō

to:

ms. skeleton key